DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 078 811 HE 004 548

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TITLE Techniques and Contributions of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign Campus, Placement and Proficiency System.
INSTITUTION Illinois Univ., Urbana. Office of Instructional Resources.
PUB DATE 73
NOTE 6p.; Presentation given at the American Educational Research Association Convention, New Orleans, Louisiana, March 1, 1973

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Academic Performance; Accelerated Programs; *Advanced Placement Programs; Advanced Programs; *College Placement; College Students; Curriculum Development; Equivalency Tests; *Flexible Progression; *Grouping (Instructional Purposes); Grouping Procedures; *Higher Education; Program Costs; Transfer Students
IDENTIFIERS *University of Illinois, Urbana

ABSTRACT

The placement and proficiency system of the University of Illinois was designed to promote good student attitudes towards courses into which they were placed enable students to perform near their maximum capability, reduce the instructor's burden by generating relatively homogeneous ability groupings in courses, and encourage students to begin advanced work at an earlier period in their academic careers. Implementation of the system is based on the establishment of an examination, a software program, incorporating decision rulings. Long-term benefits derived from the system suggest: (1) instructional costs could be reduced or rechanneled; (2) students could be permitted to graduate in less than 4 years; (3) students could be allowed to obtain credit for knowledge gained outside of the college classroom; (4) alternate tracks could be provided for students to satisfy course and program requirements; (5) students could be afforded the opportunity of pursuing major areas in great depth and of exploring new academic subjects; and (6) tests could be established to guide transfer students into appropriate programs of study. Related document is HE 004 112. (MJM)

ED 078811

Techniques and Contributions of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign Campus, Placement and Proficiency System[1]

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The placement and proficiency system at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign Campus was born in 1965 (Aleamoni & Spencer, 1968). It began by discussing the benefits such a system could provide with faculty and administrators. Once agreement to begin such a system was reached then specific courses and course sequences to be included had to be identified. The courses and course sequences that were identified happened to be the large introductory and/or required courses.

A few of the basic assumptions underlying the development of such a placement and proficiency system were to: (a) promote good student attitudes towards courses into which they were placed; (b) enable students, by more homogeneous grouping, to perform near their maximum capability; (c) reduce the instructor's burden by generating relatively homogeneous ability groupings in courses; and (d) encourage students to begin advanced work at an earlier period in their academic careers (Stallings, Aleamoni & Heil, 1972).

The first step in establishing appropriate examinations was to find or construct reliable tests which also would exhibit content as well as potential empirical validity. If one selected a nationally available standardized test, then reliability was usually not a problem but validity might be. On the other

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[1]Part of a symposium presentation entitled "Collegiate Placement and Credit Policies: Issues and Experiences" at the American Educational Research Association Convention in New Orleans, Louisiana, March 1, 1973.

hand, if one generated a test with the cooperation of the instructor(s) of a course then reliability not validity might be a problem. Regardless of the method of securing an examination, each one must be locally validated. This means that the test should be given at the beginning of a course for which proficiency credit is being considered and then again at the end of the course. Ideally, parallel or equivalent test forms should be developed and used. If the test measures what is being taught and if, on the average, students learn, then there should be a significant gain in performance. Moreover, scores on the post-test should correlate positively with course grades. When a naive student is given the test as a proficiency examination, his being granted credit is contingent upon where he ranks in the distribution of test scores, compared to students who completed the course. At the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign Campus, this means performance equal to or better than students who received a grade of C. Similarly, placement would also be contingent upon a certain level of test performance with respect to other students who successfully completed the course.

A question quite often raised is, "Should placement and proficiency decisions be based on the same examination?" The answer to this question lies in the manner in which the test was constructed (or selected) and subsequently validated. If one carefully considers the appropriateness of the test with respect to the course or instructional objectives (content validity) and then finds a high correlation between the test scores and performance in the course (empirical validity) such a test can then be used

for both placement and proficiency decisions (Aleamoni, 1973). The advantages of establishing an examination to satisfy these two functions are considerable in the time it takes the student to complete the appropriate testing, the speed with which the data is made available to the student, his advisor, etc., and the cost benefits of one testing session.

In conjunction with various cooperating academic departments, various decision rules have been arrived at in the awarding of proficiency credit and the differential placement of students. These decision rules are incorporated into the placement and proficiency software program which generates two documents, the Placement and Proficiency Form and the Placement and Proficiency List. The form is primarily for the student, his advisor and his college; the list is essentially an administrative document and is sent to the appropriate department and college. The list contains all the same information presented on the form except that up to 14 student records are contained on each page.

As can be seen in Figure 1, the form presents such data as test scores, course placements, and courses proficiencied. Moreover, local normative data in the form of deciles and expectancies are provided to give the student (and his advisor) a realistic appraisal of the student's abilities and potentialities.

Making this data available to the student and his advisor ensures either or both of selecting the most appropriate sequence of courses for the student and minimizes the number of potential misplacements. The added advantage of making this data available to the departments and colleges is that particular course enrollments can be more accurately estimated and the teaching faculty

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DATE OF PRINTING

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS FRESHMEN GUIDANCE SCORES AND DECILES

		SCORE	COLLEGE DECILES 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	ALL UNIV. DECILES 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
1	ACT/SAT English	24	44444	555555
2	ACT/SAT Mathematics	30	6666666	6666666
3	ACT Social Science	28	6666666	6666666
4	ACT Natural Science	29	555555	6666666
5	ACT/SAT Composite	28	6666666	6666666
6	SCAT Verbal	24	11	222
7	SCAT Quantitative	32	555555	555555
8	SCAT Total	56	222	3333
9	High School Percentile Rank	98	888888888	9999999999
10	Expectancy of a "C" or better grade	95	PERCENT	98 PERCENT

DI *

PLACEMENT AND PROFICIENCY INFORMATION

TEST DATE 6/10/72

	SCORE	CR	H.S. UNITS	EXPECTANCY OF "C" OR BETTER IN COURSE #1	#2	#3	CR	COURSES PROFICIENCIED / SHOULD NOT REGISTER FOR THESE COURSES	HRS	PLACEMENT / MAY REGISTER FOR THESE COURSES	CR
11 MATH INT.											
12 MATH ADV	21	5	40	89	99		B			MATH120,124	Y
13 ENGLISH	34	3	40	**	99	99	B			RH105,108;SP111	Y
14 BIOL 110	05	0	10	99			A			BIOL110	Y
15 BIOL			10								
16 CHEM	30	6	20	94	91		A			CHEM101,107	Y
17 GERMAN			20				A				
18 READ	580	7									
19 LIST	550	6						GER103	4	GER104	Y
20 TOTAL	565	7		99							
21 READ											
22 LIST											
23 TOTAL											

PROFICIENCY

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Figure 1. Example of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Placement and Proficiency Form.

more optimally allocated as well as having easy accessibility to student proficiency and guidance information for evaluation purposes.

Finally, a few of the long term benefits of a placement and proficiency system might be summarized by pointing out that: (a) instructional costs could be reduced or rechanneled; (b) students could be permitted to graduate in less than the traditional four years; (c) students could be allowed to obtain credit for knowledge acquired outside of the college classroom; (d) alternate tracks could be provided for students to satisfy course and program requirements; (e) students could be afforded the opportunity of pursuing major areas in greater depth and of exploring new academic subjects; and (f) tests could be established to guide transfer students into appropriate programs of study.

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